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ABSTRACT

This annual report summarizes the eight final reports of classroom research projects funded in May, 1990, by the Colorado Council for Learning Disabilities. Information on each project includes: title, researchers, school and location, statement of the problem, objective, population, assessment, procedure, evaluation, implications, and references. The titles and principal researchers are as follows: " An Integrated Study of Social Studies for Learning and Language Disabled Fifth-Grade Students" (Marlene Armfield and Pat Vogler); "P.E.E.R.S.--Physical Education with Extras for Raising Self-Esteem (Carol Bowie et al.); "Making a Difference for L.D. Students--Matching Reading Instruction to Reading Styles through Recorded Books" (Shirley Bradsby et al.); "Effectiveness of Using Edu-Kinesthetic Whole Brain Learning Program with the Learning Disabled, Speech Language, and Regular Classroom Students" (Sylvia Caricato et al.); "Using Tape Recorders with Reluctant Writing Students with Learning Disabilities" (Jodi Jones); "Power through Peer Tutoring: Needing To Be Needed" (Kirsten Scott and Peggy Cooney Eickelman); "Social Skills Training at the Middle School Level" (Karen Sliwkowski); and "Building Oral Language and Reading Skills" (Judy Wilson). (DB)

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RESEARCH IN THE CLASSROOM

Fifth Annual Report of Research Projects Conducted by Educators in Their Classrooms

Sponsored by
the Colorado Council for Learning Disabilities
and
the Special Education Services Unit
Colorado Department of Education

February 1992

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RESEARCH IN THE CLASSROOM

Fifth Annual Report of Research Projects
Conducted by Educators in Their Classrooms

Sponsored by
the Colorado Council for Learning Disabilities (CCLD)
and
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February 1992

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INTRODUCTION

The Council for Learning Disabilities is proud to present the fifth annual copy of *Research In The Classroom.*

The Classroom Teacher Research project was started by CCLD in 1987 to encourage teachers to conduct research in their classrooms and to report the results as an important contribution to the improvement of teaching and to the knowledge base supporting how children learn. Interest on the part of Colorado teachers has grown. To date 70 proposals have been submitted from teachers all over the state.

In 1989 two grants were awarded to memorialize Colorado colleagues who had contributed much to the field of education and particularly to special education. These grants were in memory of Audry Eicher and Jeanne Hughes. In 1991 the Ellie Smucker Memorial Fund was established by her family. This fund will continue to be the source of one grant each year which will be awarded to the researcher chosen by the research committee as the outstanding candidate. In May 1991, this grant was awarded to John J. Crawford and Marilyn Rothchild of Rosedale Elementary School in Denver, Colorado. This proposal will evaluate an affective training program for students with learning disabilities in the regular classroom.

CCLD has been designated as a tax-deductible non-profit organization. Those interested in supporting the grant concept may contribute toward its financial support through gifts made to the CCLD Grant Fund. Currently the awards range from $200 to $500 per project. Additional funds will mean more grants to classroom teacher researchers.

The material which follows summarizes the final reports of proposals awarded funding in May 1990. These summaries will hopefully encourage more teachers to undertake classroom research projects. They illustrate examples of systematic approaches focused on supplying answers to questions these teachers were curious about. Methods and results will be of value to both teachers and to students as all strive to improve classroom instruction through research.

Pauline Stein

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Committee Chairperson

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It hardly seems possible that this is the fifth issue of our research summary book. As we reflect on the whole experience of establishing research grants for teachers, it is amazing how the concept has grown. We now receive many applications from teachers each year and the quality of the proposals is much improved over when we began - a sign that both the research committee and the applicants are becoming more sophisticated. Several of us had the opportunity to share our CCLD-CDE collaborative research effort at the national CLD conference this year and we realized that Colorado is unique in this project. Not only does it provide financial and emotional support to teachers who are conducting research, but it also has this book as a vehicle to share the results of all the efforts.

As you read the results of the eight research projects conducted this year, we hope you'll be thinking how the approaches may be adapted for your students. There are wonderful ideas for meeting unique needs of students in these pages, plus the names of researchers who would love to share their experiences and the pleasure they received from their projects with you. We hope you will celebrate with us the science and the art of teaching that is demonstrated in these research project reports.

Lois Adams
Moderate Needs Project Coordinator
Special Education Services Unit

Kay Cessna
Senior Consultant
Special Education Services Unit

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Title: An Integrated Study of Social Studies for Learning and Language Disabled Fifth-Grade Students

Researchers: Marlene Armfield: Speech/Language Specialist
Pat Vogler: Learning Disability Teacher

School: Montview Elementary School
Aurora, Colorado

Statement of the Problem: The fourth- and fifth-grade social studies textbooks are too difficult for learning and language disabled students to read and/or comprehend. A personalized, hands-on approach to this subject is needed. By experiencing material from a variety of angles, by constructing a meaningful framework for relating and sequencing history and geography, by using integrated whole language studies, we believe that learning is more likely to occur. We hope this will help close the gap between services provided by specialists and the curriculum taught in the general education classroom.

Objective:
1. To enhance knowledge and appreciation of American history and geography.
2. To increase skills in using resource and other materials, including the computer.
3. To encourage self-responsibility for learning.
4. To develop social and managerial skills necessary in working with others.

Population: Fourth- and fifth-grade students identified as having significant learning disabilities and/or language disorders were placed in a resource social studies class which was cooperatively planned and taught by the learning disability teacher and the speech/language specialist. This population changed over the course of the year, with seven out of nine students transferring in or out of the program. A pre-test was administered to establish a baseline.

Procedure: American history and geography were divided into five-week units. Units were taught using methods and materials that provided experiential learning opportunities. Standard materials included monthly self-monitoring packets, maps, diaries, audio-visual materials, Timeline computer software and other computer data bases. Activities which encouraged participation through simulation and hands-on experiences included cultural fun days, collaborative work groups, videotaped oral reports, field trips and production of class newspapers. The final unit required students to make meaningful connections with the information provided throughout the course.

Evaluation: Students were evaluated by formal and informal procedures. A pre- and post-test were administered to three students who were involved throughout the course. Grades on projects and unit tests were recorded. Scores from formal evaluations in the students' primary handicapping area were compared at annual reviews.

The results indicated that this project in experiential learning was successful. Students performed well on the final unit and all maintained an 86% or higher average on projects, written exams and assignments. The three students who completed the pre- and post-test achieved an 80% increase in correct answers. Formal evaluations in the handicapping area showed growth for all students of at least one year. Three students showed such significant growth that they were staffed out of the program.

This approach was very stimulating to handicapped children. The repetitive structure of the units made it possible to maintain continuity with this transient population. The class format provided for more contact time with special education personnel (225 minutes per week for project students, 60 minutes per week for other speech/language students). Collaborative techniques contributed to the positive learning, self-concept and behavior of all, as students were able to demonstrate their areas of strength and contribute to the learning of others. Team teaching and planning provided stimulating and learning experiences for the adults, as well.

Implications: Further research is needed in the use of this experiential technique. Could it be effective for cross-categorical special education students in the general education classroom? Would extending the timeline of the project make a difference? What possibilities does this technique hold specifically for transient populations?

As a result of this project, we learned that these handicapped students needed visual experiences to precede reading and writing. The most concrete information needed to be taught first. Films were excellent for enabling students to see what they would be reading about and for learning vocabulary prior to beginning a unit. Students responded well to alternative curriculum materials, such as AAA books, road maps, photographs and media resources.

References:

Timeliner
Tom Snyder Productions
90 Sherman Street
Cambridge, MA 02140

Print Shop Graphics
Broderbund
P. O. Box 12947
San Rafael, CA 94913-2947

Inventors & Inventions
Orange Cherry
P. O. Box 390
Pound Ridge, NY 10576-0390

Story Starters: Social Studies
Pelican Software
768 Farmington Avenue
Farmington, CT 06032

Summarized by: Sue Bechard, CCLD Research Committee

Title: P.E.E.R.S. (Physical Education with Extras for Raising Self-Esteem)

Researchers: Carol Bowie, Lottie Flater, John O'Shea

School: Platte Canyon High School
Bailey, Colorado

Statement of the Problem: Students with learning disabilities often show evidence of poor self-esteem.

Objective: To design a program which utilized the physical education curriculum as a vehicle that allowed special education students with poor self-esteem to participate in activities with non-handicapped peers who had demonstrated high self-esteem and had received training in helping others develop improved self-esteem.

Population: Fifteen special education students (peers) from grades nine through twelve completed the program. Eight regular education students participated as a peer support team.

Assessment: Evaluation was primarily subjective, ongoing, occurred daily and was done by everyone in the class. Teachers met daily following the class to evaluate and prepare for the following day. The only formal testing done outside of the tests included in the P.E. curriculum was the *Piers-Harris Self-Esteem Inventory* which was administered to every student in the class as a pre- and post-test.

Procedure: A physical education class was scheduled which included 15 special education students who had two needs: 1) to fulfill the P.E. requirement for graduation, and 2) to develop improved self-esteem. These freshmen and sophomore students were known as "peers." Eight regular education students functioned as "peer support persons" in the class. These students were juniors and seniors who had demonstrated high self-esteem and leadership ability in previous years. The peers received a P.E. credit for the class while the peer support persons received a credit for leadership. The peer support persons received a six-week training course before working with the peers. All students participated daily in the P.E. activities. The physical education teacher was responsible for implementing the P.E. curriculum while the special education teacher was available in the class daily for support and counseling. Each member of the peer support team was assigned one or two peers for whom he or she was the primary support person. The peer support persons counseled with the peers, assisted them in studying for tests and acted as advocates and role models for their assigned peers inside and outside of the class.

The curriculum for the peer support training included required reading (*Assertive Discipline* by Canter and Canter, *Tough Love: A Self-Help Manual for Kids in Trouble* by York and York, *After the Tears* by Simon, various excerpts from textbooks and professional articles and teacher-developed packets). Emphasis on problem-solving skills, developing awareness of pending personal crisis, skills for averting potentially explosive situations, active listening, non-verbal attending, assertiveness and other peer counseling skills were covered in the training.

Evaluation: All students involved seemed to benefit in some way. According to the *Piers-Harris Self-Esteem Inventory*, the greatest gain in self-esteem was among the peer support team. No student score on the inventory dropped between pre- and post-testing. Subjective evaluations indicated benefits in improved test scores when group studying occurred, a decrease in the number and magnitude of confrontations among the peers, improved social skills, increased class participation, and the development of friendships.

Implications: The success of the program has inspired those who worked with it to expand it by pairing special needs students with regular education peers in academic classes as well as in P.E. classes. This offers the opportunity for continued research. The researchers felt that the *Piers-Harris Self-Esteem Inventory* was not satisfactory to adequately measure all the benefits of the program. Additional research with varied assessment tools and techniques could be of value.

Summarized by: Dennis Hamann, CCLD Research Committee

Title: Making a Difference for L.D. Students -- Matching Reading Instruction to Reading Styles Through Recorded Books

Researchers: Shirley Bradsby, Janice Wise, Sue Mundell, Susie Haas

School: Devinny Elementary School
Lakewood, Colorado

Statement of the Problem: Students with identified learning disabilities resulting in significant lags in reading may be expected to continue to experience delays unless reading instruction appropriately matches their reading style. One method of reading instruction which matches global, tactile, and kinesthetic styles is that of Recorded Books based on the research of Marie Carbo. By listening to recordings of short segments of trade books or other quality children's literature recorded at a slower-than-usual pace using natural phrasing and exaggerated emphasis and inflection to enhance meaning, students have been shown to demonstrate significant growth in the areas of reading comprehension and fluency.

Objective: By matching reading instruction to student reading styles through Carbo's recorded book method, the learner will demonstrate improved reading comprehension and fluency as well as motivation to read.

Population: Thirty-two educationally handicapped students K-6 in a cross-categorical Center School serving children with severe learning disabilities and communication deficits, as well as emotional/behavioral disorders were given the Reading Styles Inventory. This Inventory is a diagnostic reading test that identifies individual reading styles and recommends compatible approaches. These students all showed a global style with this test with the Recorded Book method being either recommended or highly recommended.

Procedure: Every child in the cross-categorical program was given the Reading Styles Inventory. Those who showed a global method of learning in which the recorded book method was recommended or highly recommended were used for the research. The students were divided into reading groups by topic of interest. Individual tapes were made of selected segments of trade books. The trade books were selected by the students and teachers. All tapes were made following the recommendations of Carbo's Recorded Book Method. The students were instructed three-five days per week with the Carbo Recorded Book method. They listened to each tape three times and their comprehension and fluency was reinforced with oral discussions, journal entries, choral and round robin reading, and reading to the students. Extension activities in written language that correlated to the content of the reading were also incorporated to develop the reading-writing connection.

Evaluation: The Brigance Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills is a criterion-referenced inventory. The reading comprehension test items were used to give an objective score as a pre-post measure. Videotapes were used and judged to help evaluate not only reading comprehension but the student's view of himself as a reader as well. Although this was much more subjective, it did help evaluate our students since it was also used as a pre-post measure.

Findings: Thirty-one of the students in the study showed significant growth in reading comprehension as measured with the Brigance. One student showed no growth, one showed one month's growth. Twenty-seven students showed at least one year's growth; of these, nine students showed one and one-half year's growth, four made at least two years' growth, three made two and one-half years' growth, and four made three or more years' growth. It is interesting to note that the students with the most growth were in the sixth grade and the ones with a year or less growth were in the first grade.

From all students who were videotaped in September, January, and May, a random sample of 13 was rated for fluency and comprehension by a panel of five teachers. All students showed marked growth in both these areas. The panel also listened to the students talk about their feelings toward reading in September and May. Again, all students appeared to feel much better about themselves as readers by May.

Implications: This research posed many questions. Further research could investigate such things as: Does the use of Recorded Books increase self-concept across all areas? Do the other components of the reading program such as writing activities make a significant difference in reading comprehension? Would Recorded Books be as successful if the stories were not taped at a consistent rate with good style and inflection? Does the overall "team" approach contribute significantly to the child's rate of reading growth? Is there a difference between children for whom the Recorded Book method was recommended and those for whom Recorded Books were highly recommended? Does the discussion of recorded books lead to expanded thinking skills? All areas of this topic could and should be explored further.

Summarized by: Shirley Bradsby, Researcher

Title: Effectiveness of Using Edu-Kinesthetic Whole Brain Learning Program with the Learning Disabled, Speech Language, and Regular Classroom Students

Researchers: Sylvia Caricato, Beth Thatcher, Toni Carter

School: South Mesa Elementary School
Pueblo, Colorado

Statement of the Problem: There is often a direct link between children who cannot easily cross the midlines of their bodies and learning disabilities.

Objective: To evaluate the usefulness of academic learning exercises, as outlined in Dennison's book, *Brain Gym*, on average, remedial and educationally handicapped students.

Population: Twenty-three students in an "average" second grade classroom included 19 right-handed children, 18 with right-eye dominance, 5 with left-eye dominance, 12 with right-brain dominance, and 11 with left-brain dominance. Six of the students exhibited blocked dominance; 4 of these were performing significantly below grade level in reading and math. In addition, these children revealed one or more learning problems.

Assessment:

1. Weekly meetings were held between speech/language, EH, and regular classroom teachers to establish individual goals for the learning deficient children.
2. At the end of the project in June, the scores on the post-test were compared with those of the pre-test determiners. Also compared were the pre- and post-test SAT scores for both regular and learning disabled children.
3. Pre- and post-test scores from the "Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale" were compared.
4. Pre- and post-test scores from the "Inferred Self-Concept Test" were compared.
5. Pre- and post-test scores on the "Class Listening Assessment" were compared.
6. The entire special population also was tested. They ranged from kindergarten through fifth grade.

Procedure: A parental inservice was held to explain the program and to obtain written parental permission for participation in the program. Pre-tests were administered in September. On the basis of the results, goals were established for each student in reading, writing, or mathematics, depending on the needs of the child. Repatterning activities were conducted weekly. A daily "Brain Gym" movement routine was established for each student and carried out daily. In addition, the speech/language specialist conducted a speaking and listening session for the whole class every week. Post-testing was administered in June.

Evaluation: Average scores on the SAT Test were compared for the entire class for kindergarten, first and second grade. The class as a whole averaged 1.2 years' growth in kindergarten, 1.7 years in first grade and 3.4 years in second grade. Remedial students remained stagnant in kindergarten, gained 1.3 years in first grade, and 2.8 years' gain in second grade. Non-remedial students gained 1.4 years in kindergarten, 2.2 years in first grade and 3.6 years in second grade.

The pre-test class average on the listening pre-test was 66%. The final score was 90%. In comparison with other second grade classrooms, this class gained 24% while the other two classes gained 21% and 18% respectively. Language-delayed students gained 42% from pre-test to post-test.

Results from the "Inferred Self-Concept Test" indicated only three months' growth in the target classrooms while the Piers-Harris results were confusing, possibly because the test was validated for fourth graders. On the other hand, however, self-concept growth for the handicapped population, as indicated by the scores on the "Inferred Self-Concept Test" increased 1.1 years for those of average I.Q., four months for the EBD students, eight months for the slow learners, and seven months for the EMR group. Previously gains were considered significant if they were from two to six months.

Implications: The results indicate that whole brain learning techniques are beneficial to all children and can enhance learning in academics and language development as well as improve self-esteem for the learning disabled child. As future curriculum plans are made, the results of this study should be considered.

Summarized by: Pauline Stein, CCLD Research Committee

Title: Using Tape Recorders with Reluctant Writing Students with Learning Disabilities

Researcher: Jodi Jones

School: Benjamin Franklin Elementary School
Littleton, Colorado

Statement of the Problem: Students with learning disabilities are often reluctant writers due to the difficulties they have in putting words on paper. Some LD students have ideas and knowledge they can express orally, but cannot put those ideas down in writing. Revisions and editing are overwhelming to these reluctant writers.

Tape recordings and transcriptions of what the student has said have been suggested in a number of writings as a helpful writing strategy (Deem, 1985) but there is no evidence in the literature to support its effectiveness. The study takes a closer look at the use of tape recordings and transcriptions for reluctant writers.

Objective: By teaching students to use a tape recorder to record their creative stories and transcribing them from these recordings, the rough drafts will be: 1) longer, 2) have more complete sentences per entire number of sentences, and 3) have more advanced vocabulary than when they have to write their story directly onto paper. It is hypothesized that if the rough draft is in better order, the editing will be lessened and the quality of the final product will be easier to accomplish.

Population: The students were from third, fourth and fifth grades, all of whom were identified as having perceptual/communicative handicaps.

There were six third graders, three females and three males; eleven fourth graders, four females and seven males; five fifth graders, one female and four males. Each group was chosen randomly from their grade levels.

Assessment: As a baseline measure of written language, writing samples were gathered utilizing a story starter, the same for all students, in November and May.

Procedure: Students were randomly selected to be in the control group and the experimental group. Eleven were in the "tape" experimental group, and nine in the control "no tape" group. In December 1990 and January 1991, the experimental group was instructed in the use of the tape recorders for taping and transcribing onto paper the text they had dictated into the tape recorder. The students checked out their tape recorders and could use them either in the regular classroom or in the Resource Room whichever was more comfortable for them. Their classroom teachers were made aware of the study and urged to see that the "tape" group used the tape recorders when writing rough drafts. However, no monitoring system was implemented to determine how often this happened.

Evaluation: The measures used were: 1) counting words per story, 2) comparing number of incomplete sentences to total number of sentences within a story, and 3) counting words of seven or more letters in length as in the Test of Written Language (TOWL). These were used with each written piece both in November and May.

The following table shows data in terms of percent of improvement for the control and experimental groups:

	Control Group	Experimental Group
Percent change in number of words	74%	249%
Percent change in number of seven-letter words	102%	169%
Change in ratio of complete sentences to total sentences	-2%	-1%
Change in ratio of seven-letter words to total number of words	0%	1%

Findings: There were two differences between the two groups. The "tape" group showed a greater percent of increase in the total number of words written than the "no tape" group. Part of this difference is due to the huge increase in total number of words by one student in the "tape" group. However, both groups showed substantial gains. The other important difference is the percent increase in seven-letter words used by the experimental group compared to the control group.

Implications: 1) Some students who were "reluctant" writers "blossomed" with much to say once they learned how to use the tape recorder. 2) There is a need to investigate further how to motivate students to use the tape recorder. 3) More strategies for evaluation of writing are needed since a factor that might have affected the data was the appeal of each story start to each student. 4) The effect that the amount of practice a student has in using a tape recorder for writing should be assessed. 5) More research is needed into the effectiveness of this method for all LD students.

Summarized by: Gertrude Meyers, CCLD Research Committee

Title: Power Through Peer Tutoring: Needing to be Needed

Researchers: Kirsten Scott and Peggy Cooney Eickelman

School: Northeast Elementary School
Parker, Colorado

Statement of the Problem: Transition between primary and intermediate buildings has been difficult because of the two-mile split between the two buildings. Research indicates that student self-esteem and attendance are based on feeling needed at school. Facilitating the transition from the primary building to the intermediate level would be a positive activity.

Objective: Through participation in the peer tutoring program, language and learning disabled students will:

1. Increase self-esteem.
2. Demonstrate increased social skills and communication.
3. Feel more comfortable with the transition to a new school.
4. Demonstrate increased academic skills in the area in which they are tutoring (writing, reading, math).

Population: Twelve fifth- and sixth-grade language learning disabled students were selected by the researchers to be peer tutors based on their individual needs.

Procedure: Students were given six weeks of peer tutor training emphasizing positive reinforcement techniques, lesson planning, communication skills, session evaluation, and role modeling from researchers. Teachers at the primary school volunteered to participate and schedules were coordinated between the two schools. Parents volunteered to drive the intermediate students to the primary school. Tutors worked with individuals in small groups of primary students once a week for 30 minutes. The researchers provided direct supervision for the first two weeks and twice during the following nine weeks. Tutors were responsible for all of their classroom assignments in order to be eligible to be a tutor.

Evaluation: Self-esteem was assessed with an informal pre- and post-survey. One student's post-survey score increased significantly, the others remained about the same. Teachers and parents reported noticeable positive effects of tutoring.

Communication and social skills were improved with the many opportunities to practice those skills, making phone calls proved to build good job-related skills. Transfer of these skills to actual tutoring was more difficult for those with speech/language problems. Students showed an increased comfort level about attending Northeast as the researchers had hoped. Assessing academic progress of the students pre-test and post-test with a WRAT-R revealed 2-13 point increase in spelling. Two students' standard scores in math increased by 17 and 25 points and the others were basically unchanged.

Implications: Future research could include assessment of students' self-esteem by parents and teachers. Assessing communication might be enhanced by having a checklist/questionnaire for the cooperating primary teachers to fill out intermittently. The researchers also felt they might use a control group for the WRAT-R for comparison of academic growth.

Summarized by: Donna Vaughters, CCLD Research Committee

Title: Social Skills Training at the Middle School Level

Researcher: Karen Sliwkowski

School: Ortega Middle School
Alamosa, Colorado

Consultation: Dr. Penelope L. Freel, Assistant Professor, Teacher Education
Adams State College
Alamosa, Colorado

Statement of the Problem: Students with learning disabilities often exhibit poor self-esteem.

Objective: To implement and measure the outcomes which result from using a systematic social skills training program with students with learning disabilities at the middle school level.

Population: Eight students with learning disabilities were selected from sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade classes who attended the resource room.

Time: The training was for fourteen weeks, two or three times per week, 50 minutes per time.

Procedure: Prior to starting the project, social skills questionnaires were completed by students, parents and the researcher. These were then analyzed to determine the social skill level of each of the eight students.

All the parts of "Transition I" and one-half of "Transition II" were administered. These included activities to develop awareness, understanding, new patterns of feeling and specific social skills. New vocabulary was studied as needed. Opportunities for dyadic communication, small group discussion and large group interaction were provided as part of the learning situation. Leaders were supplied with specific formats and suggested dialog which could be adapted to each student's need and the leader's preferences.

Evaluation: Results were evaluated in a subjective way, researchers' observations were the major source. However, several regular classroom teachers who were familiar with the project were asked to report on students' social skills in their classrooms, in the halls and in the lunchroom. In addition, student feelings were investigated.

Findings: Students reported that they enjoyed the activities. There were never discipline problems during the class. The analysis of the regular teachers' reporting and the observations of the researcher revealed progress in the development of social skills as a result of the specific training.

Implications: It would be useful to conduct a larger study with more controls on the type of student involved. A more systematic evaluation using pre- and post-testing to identify the change in attitudes of teachers and other students toward the project students would reveal more conclusive data. In addition, follow-up studies of the treated students should be conducted to determine any long-term effects. The program is easy to implement in the classroom without the help of mental health personnel which is a consideration in times of reduced budgets. However, it appears that even this small project resulted in the development of an observable improvement in social skills.

Summarized by: Pauline Stein, CCLD Research Committee

Title: Building Oral Language and Reading Skills

Researcher: Judy Wilson

School: Barney Ford Elementary School
Denver, Colorado

Statement of the Problem: Many children with learning disabilities at Ford Elementary School have a poor language background. A number of factors seem to limit the development of oral language such as limited experiences, lack of communication between home and school, little discussion of books, projects and programs at school.

Objective: To design a curriculum for reading focused on improved oral language development that would eventually improve reading skills.

Population: The entire fourth-grade class was used. Three of the children were identified as L.D., one was identified as Emotionally Disturbed, and three had been referred for learning disabilities but not staffed. Many of the students had had very negative school experiences, and were negative about school, had displayed behavior problems.

Assessment: Iowa Test of Basic Skills

Procedure: The class was divided into three reading groups for basal reader program, to be certain that all skills were included. The Riverside Literature Based Reading Program was selected. Each reading session was for 45 minutes.

After the first 45 minutes, a cooperative learning whole language program including reading and written language was begun. The entire class read four novels together. Additionally, 50 books were read to and with the children. The list of books was gathered from recommendations of the fourth-grade teachers, lists such as Literature and Critical Thinking series, and the children themselves. To enhance creative thinking, daily lessons included word splashes, relationship charts, maps of the areas we read about, posters by the children, and a trial to determine if the wolf was guilty or innocent in the *Three Little Pigs.*

To involve the parents, we had a kick-off breakfast in November and a concluding breakfast in May. There was 90% attendance. We discussed favorite books and told stories to each other. A monthly newsletter was also sent home with each child.

Evaluation: Using anecdotal records and test scores, the program was successful because vocabulary in class participation, and language use improved. Test scores in vocabulary and language on the Iowa Test improved. Oral reading and comprehension improved in the classroom situation, but not on grade level and percentile scores on the Iowa Test.

Findings: The work with parents which included the newsletters, notices, reminders to come to conferences, breakfasts, staffings, etc. helped to develop a more positive accord. Parents were unanimous in declaring this was the best year the children had in school.

None of the children that were identified for special education were ever sent to In School Suspension. When these children were in third grade, they were often sent to ISS.

When students were asked to edit their written work, after preparing a list of punctuation marks and grammatical constructs to use, there was resistance and it was difficult for them; however, this became a routine procedure.

Implications: The need for looking at other than traditional approaches to teaching children with a variety of learning problems is essential. Cooperation of the regular teachers and special education teachers is necessary for success in such an undertaking. Parent involvement is worth the effort.

While this was a good year for the students in the program, it was just as much a good year for the teachers involved who enjoyed working together, and developing a new approach to teaching.

Resources: *Literature Based Riverside Reading Program*, Riverside Publishing Company

Novels: *Be a Perfect Person in Three Days,* Scholastic
Pinballs by Betsy Byars, Scholastic
Call it Courage, Armstrong Sperry
Charlotte's Web by E. B. White

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